

November 9, 2004

### **Rabid Skunk Attacks Gooding Area Teen; First Skunk Diagnosed in Idaho**

A rabid skunk attack on a Gooding area teenager last week is prompting South Central District Health to caution local residents to be cautious of skunks in their area. This is the first rabid skunk ever diagnosed in Idaho.

The teen was attacked on Nov. 4 in broad daylight while playing in her backyard. On Nov. 8, the Idaho State Laboratory reported the skunk had tested positive for rabies. The teen is under treatment to prevent the disease and is doing fine.

Rabies is a fatal viral infection that affects the brain. Rabies is spread in the saliva of an infected animal during a bite, but any contact with saliva or blood from an infected animal could transmit the disease.

SCDH recommends the public in the Gooding - Wendell area be especially cautious for rabid animals and encourages community members to take the following steps to reduce their risk and control the spread of rabies:

- Make sure your dogs and cats are up-to-date on all vaccines, especially rabies.
- Avoid wildlife that does not appear to be behaving normally. Abnormal behavior in skunks includes daytime activity, aggressive behavior, convulsions, and foaming at the mouth. Skunks are normally nocturnal, quiet, secretive, and afraid of humans. Report suspicious animals to the local animal control officer, the Gooding County Sheriff's office, or Fish and Game.
- If a wild animal or an unvaccinated domestic pet has bitten you, seek medical attention immediately.
- If your pet has had a fight with a wild animal recently, take them to a veterinarian right away for evaluation and possible rabies boosters.
- Pick up or cover uneaten pet food outside to discourage wild animals from coming near your pets or your home.
- Be cautious about trapping skunks, raccoons, and other wild animals. Animals that appear sick should be euthanized, then triple-bagged and disposed of in the garbage or buried.

There is the possibility that the rabid skunk in Gooding County could have spread rabies to other domestic or wild animals in the area before a family member of the teen killed it. Skunks tend to live communally with around 5-8 per den so there may be more rabid den-mates roaming the area. Also, they are attracted to readily available food sources like dog and cat food so it is possible skunks coming into contact with domestic pets could transmit rabies to them. In addition to skunks, other carriers of rabies include bats, raccoons, foxes, coyotes, and other biting animals.

Medical assistance should be obtained as soon as possible after an exposure. One of the most effective methods to decrease the chances for infection involves thoroughly washing the wound with soap and water. A physician will decide whether vaccinations are necessary to prevent rabies infection. Current vaccines are relatively painless and are given in the arm, like a flu or tetanus vaccine.